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# Challenges In Reforming Madrassa Education In Pakistan

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## Abstract

The Madrassah education has remained an integral part of the education system of Pakistan. The difficult part is that the whole education system is reformed and changed yet Madrassah education has remained the same. The private schools are following the international standards of education while the madrassah education falls behind. The discussions of reforming the madrassah have been initiated but in practice, nothing has happened. So, it is significant to realize the challenges in reforming the madrassah education so the work can be done in the right direction. General Ayub tried to reform the madrasah by cutting the non-relevant subjects but he was considered liberal and due to political instability the outcome of reforming madrassah education was not effective. While at the time of Zia-ul-Haq the education in Madaris was not reformed due to the mere fact that they thought the reforming of madrasah will mean becoming under the influence of government that they never wanted. In president Musharraf's time, the ulema rejected to reform the Madaris as the ordinance passed in 2005 made them feel that the madrassah is promoting extremism. Later on, the National Action Plan enforced the law for the registration of madrassah and its curriculum. The two major challenges are the government and the Madaris themselves. With the right coordination between the Madrassah and the government, the Reforming of madrassah can happen successfully.

**Keywords:** Madrassah, education, reforming, ulema, extremism.

## Introduction

The Madrassah education plays an integral part in the system of education but the matter of concern is that it falls behind concerning the international standard of education. The international standards if maintained while delivering the education by Madrassah then the innovation and diversity will prevail. It is of vital importance to understand the root causes of the resistance from the madrasa leadership to accept the changing socio-economic and

political realities and accommodate them in their curriculum and educational system which is very close to the spirit of Islam. Resistance from madrasa leadership to accept the participation of other stakeholders in the management of madrasas is rooted in their monopoly on imparting religious knowledge. As one madrasa administrator put it, “how does the Government know anything about the administration of religious education; they know nothing”. This monopoly gives them not only religious leadership but a tremendous amount of political power, especially when the political will and the government’s writ are so weak.

It is significant to understand the core problems of the opposition from Deeni Madrassas' leaderships in response to the changing socio-economic and political realities and accommodate them in their curriculum and educational system. The challenges were seen in every era whenever the modernization of madrasa education took place. The Madaris cooperation is needed for their reforming along with it cooperation from the government side is also important. The awareness should prevail among the people to reform Madaris because ultimately the people are getting benefit from the Madrassah education. Madrassah education is an integral part of Pakistani society so its reforming is as important for the development of Pakistan as it is the part of the education system. Wherever education is involved it means developing knowledge and skills so it becomes necessary that it is monitored. Some major reforms and their resistance are discussed below.

### **Challenges confronted by President Ayub Khan's reforms**

President Ayub Khan imposed the first martial law in Pakistan. Reforms were introduced in many institutions. The curriculum of madrassas was also under the shadow of this reformation process; he eliminated all the unnecessary subjects both religious and non-religious. During President Ayub’s era, Islam was used for the progress of socio-economic development as is also obvious from the 1962 constitution. He wanted Islam to be the same progressive religion as it was back in the golden age of Muslims. He proposed some changes to the Islamic traditional madrasa curriculum to gain the above-mentioned objectives. For this purpose, he launched a reform program and set up a committee that was formed in 1960 (Khalid Saleem<sup>2</sup>, 2020).

The purpose of these reforms was to get rid of the unnecessary subjects of the curriculum and also to overcome the ideas of superstitions that have been developed with the passage of time. Moreover to represent the old untraditional style of learning Islamic education which can keep up with the pace of time for this purpose President Ayub Khan also wrote a letter to Muhammad Shafi of Darul Uloom Deoband of Karachi. In 1962 the committee came up with changes to the syllabus of madrassas in Pakistan (Lodhi M. S., 2015).

The challenges confronted by Ayub Khan’s regime were mainly because of his liberal point of view about Islam. In response to President Ayub Khan’s reforms grievances of the

religious community were seen towards different reform policies. Entire Ayub's era, Jmat.e.Islami endlessly criticized the policies introduced by him. To counter his policies of modernization monthly magazines were published by Jmat.e.Islami JI by the name of chiragh.e.rah. President Ayub was a strong supporter of the modern family system and introduced MFLO (Muslim family Law ordinance) and birth control which was not acceptable to the ulema of that era. The government research center which promotes modernity came under attack from JI protestors. President Ayub tried to bring reforms in the education system of madrassas but it was not materialized because of political instability (Lodhi, 2015).

### **Zia ul Haq reforms and Challenges faced by his regime**

During the era of President Zia Ul Haq, the number of Madrassa in Pakistan increased at a rapid pace. The establishment of New Madrassas was supported by his military regime. Besides this, he also tried to reform the Madrassa curriculum according to his thoughts. Reforms were introduced under the guidelines of two important reports one is called the Sargodha report and the Halepota report (Lodhi M. S., 2015). During president Zia's visit to Sargodha religious seminaries, he met some ulema there who demanded autonomy for Madaris. He gives the task to the religious affairs ministry to do an investigation and make a report on the problems faced by teachers and students of religious institutions. The report covers all the problems, the student and teachers of Deeni madrassas and also some solutions were recommended. This report was famously known as the Sargodha report (Hussain, 2015).

### **Hale porta Report**

It was introduced with the assistance of famous educationist and religious scholar Dr. Hale porta, who formed a committee for Madrassas. Tasks were assigned to this committee for the improvement of madrassa education. Some other tasks that were assigned to this comity include improving the quality and the job nature of madrassa students and teachers. The committee was also advised to equalize the degrees of madrassa students to other academic degrees of secondary school colleges and universities. To accomplish the above-mentioned goals the committee suggested a new formal syllabus for madrassas students including some modern subjects. The Halepota Report came forth with the recommendations to taught subjects such as those Social sciences, Mathematics, General Science, Urdu, and Pakistan Studies at the primary level along with the other subjects of the madrassa. While subjects like Political Science, Economics, and English were to be taught at the graduate level of madrassas (Lodhi M. S., 2015).

The committee suggested incorporating Tafseer, Fiqah, Hadith, and Maqoolat. To get a master's degree in any one of the themes, a research paper was suggested to be compulsory in a relevant subject. To get the master level degree three other subjects were recommended

to be compulsory such as the Islamic economy, History, Islam, and politics were added while comparative religion was kept as an optional subject (Ashraf, 2015) The committee also suggested an establishment of a national board or institute to check, to revise, and upgrade curricula of madrassas with time. It also suggested that the final exam results of the primary, middle, and higher-level should be declared by these apex boards. Besides these suggestions, they also recommended appointing external teachers for modern subjects unless madrassa can produce their own (Lodhi M. S., 2015).

### **Challenges in President Zia ul Haq's Government**

In President Zia's regime, the ulema was agreed to the initiatives of madrassa education reforms. The majority of ulema and madrassa students of that time were in favor of his policies to provide the free-range role of the religious institutions and their leaders in the segment of the society other than the Nikahkhwan, prayer leaders, Taveez writers, etc. So the question arises here that what went wrong that the reforms of the Zia regime were not implemented effectively as they should be. All the madrassas sects even the Deoband school of thought doubted that the state regulating madrassas had affected the predominance of the institutions. Some ulema criticized religious institutions as the puppets of the state and bureaucracy (Bano, 2007).

A famous Deoband madrassa representative Muhammad Yusuf Ludhianwi appraised the reforms as not very appealing. He considered that these reforms will serve the interest of the government more than the religious institutions. According to him the madrassas with these reforms can produce good government servants' not religious leaders. He persuaded the religious institutions to reject the reforms suggested in the curriculum as the policy of the equality of the curriculum was not accepted by many ulema. He said that an Alim or a good knowledgeable religious leader will not accept this uniform curriculum of all sects nor he will accept the hybrid form of the syllabus. This hybrid form of education is more likely to produce a cadre not a student well for worldly matters neither a religious specialist (Bano, 2007).

Wafaq-ul-Madaris also rejected this plan that was proposed for their affiliation process and exam system. Their opinion was loud and clear that no external teachers will be allowed to teach any subject to the madrassa students, as they were not ready to give up their autonomy. An alternative approach was presented for this purpose by the government so that the autonomy can remain preserved but it was also rejected as the reservations of the ulema were not addressed. Leaders of the Deeni madrassa were clear about one thing that whatever the committee proposes to the government the policies will remain in their hands and madrassas will become the puppet in the hand of the government officials which was not acceptable to them (Bano, 2007).

## **Reforms and Challenges in President Musharraf's government**

Musharraf's regime was pressurized after the 9/11 incident by foreign powers to regulate madrassas as it was criticized badly by the western world. So his government came up with the enlightened ideas of reformation by adding some modern philosophies to the curriculum of Deeni Madaris. Same like General Ayub Khan reforms in madrassa education General Pervez Musharraf's reforms in religious education was also based on modern philosophies so that he can use Islamic philosophies as a tool for economic uplift for the society and also reforming the very nature of the society from religious to secular and modern (Fakhr-ul-Islam).

As per demand madrassas education modernization plan was constituted and can be divided into two parts:

- 1- Pakistan Madrassa Education Board(PMEB)Ordinance
- 2- Madrassa Reform Project

### **Pakistan Madrassa Education Board Ordinance**

PMEB was proclaimed on 18 august 2001(four weeks before the events of September, 11), to modernize the madrassa education. The federal cabinet passes this ordinance in June 2002. The basic aims of the PMEBS ordinance 2001 were to equalize and secure the standard of education in Madrassas by integrating some modern subjects into the curriculum, introducing one curriculum, one exam, and dual education that is formal and religious. An apex board got the authority to set the curriculum the examination system and hold to teachers training programs. The second objective was the registration of religious seminaries. PMEBS established model madrassas at the official level across the country. For this purpose, three model madrassas were established from 2001 to 2003 one for girls in Islamabad, two for boys one in Sukkur, and one in Karachi. However, only 500 madrassas applied for registration under this law of ordinance out of 25,000 (Amin, 2015).

### **Madrassa Reform Project (MRP)**

To fulfil the above mention objectives a five years plan was introduced by the MRP. A financial sum of 100 million dollars was provided by the government, aiming to implement the modern syllabus for 8000 madrassas to teach modern subjects like English, General Science and social studies on the primary and secondary level and English, Economics, Pakistan Studies, Computer Science at higher levels. Post 9/11 incidence international community pressurized Pakistan's government to regulate madrassas. Since President Musharraf was already modernizing the curriculum but after the focus of international superpowers, Pakistani madrassas were a target as the hub of terrorists and militancy. In addition to these aims and objectives, MRP was aiming to facilitate teachers of madrassas by providing them different training courses and making them able to teach modern subjects.

Financial reforms were also introduced that includes the point of providing permanent salaries to the teachers (Amin, 2015).

### **Challenges in President Musharraf regime**

Cabinet approved the 2002 ordinance of reforming madrassa but president Musharraf does not sign that ordinance. Due to this non-approval from the president this ordinance was not implemented. As in the neo-patrimonial states, the meetings of the cabinet are ceremonial the real authority lies with the ruler. The ordinance was also harshly criticized by the Wafaq and Tanzeem of Madaris (Lodhi H. A., 2015).

### **Madrassa Ordinance-2005**

The Din-i-Madaris Voluntary Registration and Regulation Ordinance 2005, made clear that none of the religious seminaries would operate without registration. Every madrassa is bound to submit their educational details and other activities to the registrar, none of the madrassas would be allowed to teach hatred literature and stir sectarianism (Lodhi M. S., 2015).

### **Ulema's Response over the Madrassa Ordinance 2005**

The Secretary-General of Mutahida Majlis E Amal, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who was also in opposition in the NA, rejected the Ordinance entirely by saying that madrassa education did not possess any kind of extremist ideas and does not encourage sectarianism. He declared that Madrassas do not rely on government funds so disclosing every matter to the government officials and their interference in the mechanism of Denni Madaris will be an outbreak on its anatomy. He said that they have returned here only for the sovereignty of religious institutes otherwise they will left the assembly. (Lakshman, 2005, p.5) Mulana Sami-ul-Haq, chief his faction of the Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam, feared that Pakistan would become a nonspiritual state in case of dismantling the madrassa he expresses his views that Pakistan will become a secular state by adapting all those descriptions from the west and in this way our true essence will also be lost. Same with the case of madrassas its autonomy and spirituality must be prevailed not interfered with by the suggestion of any third party (Bano, 2007).

### **18<sup>th</sup> Amendment: Challenge for Deeni Madaris**

The issue of the reform has become perplexed after the endorsement of the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment. The national assembly passed the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment of the on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010. The amendment simply declares the provincial autonomy for the betterment of the provincial government and institutions. Furthermore, the amendment removes the power of the president to unilaterally dissolve the assembly and turning the form of government from parliamentary to semi-presidential. Under this amendment, the control of Islamic education was also passed to the provincial governments. The provincial governments are currently clueless

about the reforms. Because they had not dealt with such kinds of issues before the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment (Zaidi, 2013).

### **Current Challenges Confronted by Government**

As a result of negotiations between the Ittihad-ul-Tanzeemat-e-Madaris Pakistan, it was suggested that the madrassa education commission would be designed the way the higher education commission is working. This was for the purpose to observe the madrassa education and monitor the curriculum and the activities of Madaris to regulate the better relationship between the government and religious institutions. In October 2010 the government of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) was somehow succeeded to link religious institutions with the Tanzeemat.e.Madrassis Pakistan and make different policies regarding registration and curriculum. They temporarily added some subjects to the Metric and Inter level. (Zaidi, 2013). Ulema always show some sort of grievances that whenever the reform initiatives took place, they were always targeted with a biased attitude. This behavior by the leading has some strong foundations. Like ulema argued that we allow different researchers local and foreigners to take our interviews and look around madrassas but many of the writers for their publicity and rating propagate things and fabricate issues that don't even exist. Many of the madrassas do not have any issue to go through the registration process and some madrassas teach modern subjects too but the real issue is an autonomous body of the madrassas (Sajjad, Spring 2013).

The government is also confronting with the challenge that most of the times leaders of Deeni Madaris do not cooperate with the government, religious leaders have a solid excuse for this as the religious teachers argued that the religious seminaries do not depend financially on the government even than they are threatened the disturbance of their sovereignty be government agencies. They have strong reservations about raiding Deeni Madaris and expelling the foreign students, as it is considered humiliation of these religious institutions (Sajjad, Spring 2013). The government has also been accused of not doing enough on the ground for the betterment of these institutions. They only made statements in the media. Though great damage has been done on the media, where the traditional role of Madaris has been undermined, ridiculed and their image has been destroyed in the eyes of the public (Sajjad, Spring 2013).

### **National Action Plan**

The National Action Plan (NAP) is an essential part of Pakistan's war against terrorism. After 2015 NAP provides the basic guideline, following which Pakistan formulated its counter-terrorism policy. NAP was formulated after the inhumane terrorist attack on the school children in Peshawar. It introduces practical steps like use force to deal with the menace of terrorism. Besides, it also impresses upon other related-issues like Madaris which require registering and reforms, solidification of the law enforcement mechanism, establishment of

strengthened institutions, improvements in Baluchistan and bringing FATA under the administrative control of the federal government, etc. (Khan, 2017)

National Action Plan provided the following two measures for Madrassa reforms

### **Registration Forms and Mechanism**

NACTA formed “Madaris Data & Registrations Forms” in consultation with Ittihad e Tanzeem ul Madaris. It was under the guidance of the meeting that was on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2015 under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister of Pakistan. It also established a mechanism that only registered religious seminaries should be allowed to operate. The forms have been prepared and finalized after consultation with all stakeholders including provinces and are ready for adoption after approval by the Prime Minister. (Terrorism, n.d.)

### **Curriculum and Status Issue**

Two committees with representation from ITMP were established to revisit curricula and a mechanism for granting equivalence of status to Madaris Isnad vis-a-vis Formal Degrees. The first committee is working under the heads of the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education and the second committee is working under the chairman Higher Education Commission (HEC) regarding the grant of equivalence certificate to “Wafaq-ul-Madaris for Sanad Shahadat ul Aama wa Khasa”. Both committees have made extensive deliberations for early completion of the process (National Action Plan, 2014, 2015)

National Action Plan (NAP) has joint consent and venture of the civil and military bureaucracy to eradicate extremism, terrorism, and its mindset from the country. The national action plan was put into the progress as a whole agenda of 20 points and one of its points address the registration of religious institute and madrassa education. Mainstreaming the religious seminaries seems to be far from satisfactory. Regulation and registration are still in the progress. A deadlock has been developed between the government officials and the religious institutions as both have failed to sort out the procedure for stepping further. Though some actions have been taken against the seminaries suspected to erupt hateful sentiments and extremism in Punjab and Sindh provinces but the resistance is faced by the government on every step of reform from the country’s biggest network, Wafaq ul Madaris Al-Arabia (Rathore, 2017)

### **Ground realities**

### **National Action Plan a Success or Failure**

There are some reasons for which the national action plan is not doing at its utmost.



An apex committee on the body which monitors the progress and implementation of the NAP has been silent about the progress as very few steps have been taken so far. The first meeting between the government officials and madrassa leaders was a failure as the reforms were rejected by the religious institutions considering it unnecessary and not fulfilling the demands. Still working out the middle path the religious affairs department is in contact with the Madaris (Rathore, 2017).

The progress of NAP is articulated as a failure as very little is done by the officials in this regard. Simply the issues of madrassas can be easily solved just by the clean and clear registration process, but in this segment, the progress is also limited. The government has made things rather complex by assigning different officials to the task. Every bureaucratic system has its technique and especially in developing countries like Pakistan, the government policies are abundant while the implementation processes are usually slow. Bureaucrats coming from various departments like interior, education, and religious affairs divide the whole issues which can be the cause of delay in implementation (Rathore, 2017).

Secondly, the madrassas modernization process is also on hold because the government hardly took the religious leaders in confidence or whenever they agree on the reformation process they hardly address their concerns. Madrassa authorities cast doubts on the reformation process so that's why the government faces resistance. Similarly, these institutions are reluctant to search operations and call protests if any law enforcement agencies interrupt daily activities at their religious schools. Thirdly, in addition to fearing hostile responses from religious seminaries, the government also seems confused about how to deal with seminaries at all (Rathore, 2017). Fourth; the absence of political determination coupled with dissimilarities within the government about the madrassa issue, however, has resulted in the direful achievements of ribbon development. The madrassa reformation efforts this time is not so different from the reformation efforts from the past. The basic cruxes of these reforms are almost similar. On the other hand, Madrassa's authority said that there is a lack of clear policy regarding modernizing and streamlining madrassas (Rathore, 2017).

The madrassa indication and registration are part of the NAP to overcome the promotion of terrorism through religious education. This religious education is thus guided by extremist thought for increasing individuals that take part in terrorist activities. There were 9,590 madrassas in the Sindh province out of which 6,503 were registered. However 3,662 Madrassas along with their exact locations have been identified under the National Action Plan. Also, the government is trying hard to induce modern-day and technical education in the curriculum of these madrassas. So that children seeking education from these religious institutions may not feel alienated once graduate (Khan, 2017). Another most important point of NAP is to Ban on hate literature. It would play a decisive role in reducing the number of people joining various organizations and groups that are aimed at promoting sectarian

and ethnic conflicts. Also, it would enable the people of the society to live more of a normal life than to act radically. The implementation process of the NAP is still in progress (Khan, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

In the current polarized political situation in Pakistan, one side is the government and the other side is the militant group between the government and militancy religious institutions are demanded to make their side clear. Till now every government that comes forth for the reformation of the madrassa education system has been confronted with different challenges. From the previous study, it can be concluded that the main challenge in the reformation process is Pakistan's government and the religious institution itself. The situation is however delicate and complex but by playing the right cards Pakistani government can be benefited by aligning the hard-core religious leaders by their side. After 9/11 the reformation in the madrassas system and its education in Pakistan was part of the "development of the war on terror. "It has been nineteen years since General Pervez Musharraf Publicized the PME0 in 2001, the efforts of the governments of reforming to reform Madaris is in shambles. Despite the commitments made by the government and madrassas the progress of the reform process has been confronted with numerous problems. In the aftermath of the school attack in Peshawar, the National Action Plan reinvigorated the debate on the religious institution started again. However, the National Action Plan does not produce any substantial results so far. The issue of the religious organization of reforming is of three forms the registration, regulation, and reformation. In all of these procedures of streamlining governments have been confronted with many challenges from madrassas too. Till now the effective results have not been produced because of the triviality of both the parties' government and religious institutions.

The government of Pakistan lacks the will and the seriousness to reform madrassa education same the religious leaders in every government join hands with the sitting government to get their personal benefits. The same was the Zia Ul Haq's government, he introduces Islamisation policies to strengthen his regime. The same can be concluded about the reformation policies of President Musharraf as his entire efforts to reforms Madaris were to avail the opportunity to retain his government, Madrassa reforms were a tool of, which he get this extension. The crux of all the government reforms has remained the same which can be one of the reasons for the failure of madrassa reforms. As a developing state, Pakistan introduces policies but how far these policies can benefit these institutions can only be observed after implementation which is half-heartedly done in every government.

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